



Education

Self-rising: Baking skills change lives

WINNER

The Bread Project

breadproject.org

Innovation: A new, fast-track model for workforce development.

Location: Berkeley

Executive Director: Alicia Polak

Employees: 9
+ 3 independent contractors

Revenue: \$1,283,977; of that \$370,905 from social enterprise income

Regional significance: Job training and placement for low-income individuals.

East Bay Favorites: Climbing Claremont Canyon, Bowl'd, Bette's Oceanview Diner, coffee at 7/11 on University in Berkeley!

Based on the premise that baking is a skill that is replicable and transferable across cultures, The Bread Project was founded in 2000 to help low-income individuals develop job skills and become self-sufficient.

While the organization was meeting the usual metrics set for workforce development programs, staffers and Executive Director Alicia Polak, who came aboard in 2011, recognized the need for a quicker pathway to employment.

"Our students are low income and faced with a number of challenges, from child care to transportation. They're refugees and formerly incarcerated individuals who have very little in the way of support," says Polak.

"The standard 12-week training program was a hardship. By condensing the program, we could get them into the workplace more quickly."

In response, The Bread Project created a three-week intensive Bakery Bootcamp for clients with the greatest need.

"We went against conventional wisdom and totally redesigned the curriculum," says Polak. "We were lucky to have partners like the Tipping Point Community and Chevron who listened and encouraged us to think out of the box."

Bread Project trainees learn both the hard skills of safe food handling, culinary math and basic baking as well as how to follow directions, take personal responsibility, manage their time and conduct



"Graduates find work in less than 30 days on average."

Alice Polak, Executive Director, The Bread Project

themselves as kitchen professionals. Participants benefit from 15 months of additional follow up services.

Since its re-introduction in January 2014, The Bread Project has had a 90 percent graduation rate and helped 130 individuals (85 percent) find jobs — in less than 30 days on average.

For clients who must start over in life, The Bread Project can be both a lifeline and a route forward.

"Trainees gain a sense of self-worth, purpose and a network of support," says Polak. "Employment can offer meaningful responsibilities, regular routine and a new network of peers for those facing significant life changes."

The Bread Project earns about a third of its revenue from social enterprise, selling its products to local school districts and mainstream retailers like Williams-Sonoma.

Creating opportunities for 'digital natives'

FINALIST

Hack the Hood

hackthehood.org

Innovation: Training low-income youth for careers in tech.

Location: Oakland

CEO/Executive Director/Co-founder: Susan Mernit

Employees: 15

Revenue: \$1.2 million

Regional significance: Tech training for underserved youth.

East Bay Favorite: Oakland & Berkeley YMCAs.

While working with adult volunteers in Oakland's shop local movement to give small businesses online visibility, Susan Mernit had an idea: What if we "flip the script" and get young people to build the websites?

"Oakland's tech economy was on the rise, but residents and youth — the power users of mobile technology we call 'digital natives,' were largely excluded from the new opportunities being created," says Mernit, herself an entrepreneur and a former tech executive.

"There's a deep divide in how the benefits and challenges of technology affect people's lives, as well as who has access to technology training and careers."

Mernit's solution was Hack the Hood, an award-winning nonprofit that introduces low-income youth of color to careers in tech by hiring and training them to create websites for actual small businesses in their own communities.

Launched in 2013 with funding from the City of Oakland as a six-week summer "boot camp," just a year later Hack the Hood won a \$500,000 Google Challenge award. The grant brought the fledgling organization nationwide publicity and attracted additional public and private funding.

Hack the Hood used the money to develop a train-the-trainer model to expand beyond Oakland to Richmond, East Palo Alto and Watsonville. Additional sites are planned for this summer.

During ongoing summer camps and afterschool programs,



"We're all about creating economic opportunities for young people."

Susan Mernit
CEO/Executive Director & Co-founder, Hack the Hood

young people gain hands-on experience building responsive, mobile-friendly websites, executing search engine optimization and helping businesses get listed in local online directories.

Program participants have built free websites, valued at \$500,000, for 300 small businesses. More than 80 percent of participants have stayed in high school, enrolled in college or advanced job training, or found jobs.

In January, Hack the Hood began a pilot digital marketing paid-apprenticeship program and is actively recruiting companies to participate.

"It's a triple win for everyone," says Mernit. "Small businesses are helped to keep pace with mobile technology. Young people get training and jobs. And our tech partners learn the value of a diverse workforce that drives innovation."